

# Circulate, don't coagulate

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HAWKINS, Texas—Most of us have in our Bible maps of the Middle East that include the Sea of Galilee (or the Sea of Kinnereth) and the Dead Sea (or the Salt Sea). Characteristics of these two bodies of water will provide the dominant analogy or metaphor for this article.

This analogy did not originate with me. I heard it expounded at a Feast of Tabernacles service in Pensacola, Fla., several years ago.

The metaphor suggested by this comparison illustrates one of God's perennial principles, one that is as significant as some of God's other perennial principles, such as:

- You will reap what you sow.
- If you want friends, you must be friendly.
- If you exalt yourself, you will be abased.
- Whoever tries to save his own skin will lose it.
- Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

To put the thesis statement, or purpose statement, into one compact little aphorism, we could say: "If you don't circulate, you'll coagulate." (If you don't get anything else out of this article, remember the aphorism "If you don't circulate, you'll coagulate"—or perhaps just "Circulate, Don't Coagulate.")

## **Contrasting seas**

When we take a look at the Sea of Galilee even on the smallest map, we see a little line coming down from the north (an inlet bringing fresh water from the Galilean mountains, including Mount Hermon, east of Dan) and an outlet on the south end of the sea emptying into the Jordan River, where it eventually spills into the Dead Sea.

The topology has provided both an inlet and an outlet to keep the water in place and fresh by continuous movement and circulation. The southern shore of the Sea of Galilee drops in altitude markedly from the northern inlets, providing a natural gravitational circulation system.

By contrast, the Dead Sea, because it lies below sea level (like our own Death Valley north of Baker, Calif., or even our city of New Orleans), has no outlets but serves as a trap or sump to trap sediment, decaying vegetable and animal matter, silt, waste and garbage—becoming a body of water unfit to drink or sustain life.

If you would observe a relief map of Israel, you would notice that the Dead Sea (or Salt Sea) is lower than anything surrounding it. It serves as a one-way sump or trap—with several inlets on each side—but absolutely no outlets, allowing the sodium deposits to accumulate to toxic levels, inviting the label Salt Sea or Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea is dead because a circulation cycle to freshen its contents has not taken place. All living things from the basic cell to the interdependent ecosystem require cycles of circulation. If they don't circulate, they coagulate.

### Look to the cell

My late mentor, J. Samuel Bois, in his book *The Art of Awareness* described the cell as the basic living organism that sustains itself in the midst of throughput, some of which is transformed into a higher level of potential (metabolized into energy for productive work or converted into living tissue) while the rest is expelled as waste products (to be turned over to other living cycles to begin other cyclical processes).

In the words of the old Yiddish proverb, *Oyf Mist iz geroten Korn*, or "Corn grows in manure."

As long as the cycles continue to function, the cell, the multicellular organism and the whole ecosystem functions properly and harmoniously. If any of the cycles become blocked or impaired, the cell, the organism and eventually larger interdependent systems in the ecosystem get thrown out of whack and the organism becomes diseased.

### Too much clutter

God Almighty quite forcefully pounded me over the head with this circulate-coagulate need for completed cycles when several close friends helped me move.

I realized that I had had schlepped boxes of clutter around for several decades. Both of my parents lived through the Depression and were deathly afraid of throwing or giving things away that might come in handy. We had a four-car garage back on the farm that was rarely used for cars because we had accumulated so much stuff that needed to be stored.

Henry David Thoreau pointed out in *Walden* that, when a badger gets its paw caught in a trap, it gnaws it off. We *Homo sapiens* carry our traps around with us.

I bought a shredder this summer. Even after several weeks at five hours every evening shredding, I still had more than 100 boxes of sorted clutter. The final blow came when we were packing and my friend Rex Ulmer brought me an old medical receipt dating back to 1979. Rex said, "Dave I thought I was a pack rat, but . . . do you still really need this?"

That humiliating insight turned the switch on for this article. It was the precise moment I asked myself: What do debt, clutter, fat or obesity and sluggish spiritual growth have in common?

The common denominator of all these maladies stems from broken or interrupted cycles. Throughput moving through any system, the physical, psychological and spiritual must be metabolized at an even, continuous rate that allows ingestion and assimilation (conversion into energy for work) and elimination.

My boxes of clutter, my pounds of fat and the and the permadebt on my credit cards all represented unmetabolized fuel waiting for assimilation.

### **Metabolic cycle**

Ecclesiastes 3:6 talks about a continuous process of input-assimilation-output: "a time for planting, a time for plucking up, a time for gathering, and a time for throwing away."

In the heart of the cycle one finds the process of metabolism—the chemical reaction of decomposing the throughput—converting it into fuel-energy for work and body tissue. If the supply of throughput comes too fast, much of the caloric intake is stored as fat and the system becomes clogged, much like the burning barrel in the backyard would become clogged as I tried to feed the fire too fast.

The metabolism rate (the rate at which the organism burns up fuel) must keep pace with the supply of fuel, or the cycle becomes interrupted—and conversely if the metabolic output exceed the input, as is the case in the oxygen debt where lactic acid buildup occurs because of oxygen depletion.

The apostle Paul suggests a spiritual metabolism problem has taken place in the Churches of God in the diaspora.

In Hebrews 5:14 Paul complains: "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use [exercise—fat and calorie burning—illustrated by charitable deeds and obedience to God's law, spiritual metabolism] have learned to [trained themselves to] distinguish good from evil."

It requires doing something. We have an electronic treadmill at Texas College. It provides feedback on the number of miles run and the fat and calories burned. I learned that just standing on the treadmill with the motor turned off doesn't burn off the fat or the calories. It take vigorous movement to complete the metabolism cycle. Growth, physical, psychological and spiritual, does not take place unless some activity or work is expended.

Spiritual growth does not occur with intake only. Paul in Hebrews 6:1-4 suggests that the Church of God in the diaspora had received a liberal supply of spiritual throughput (tasted and shared in the Holy Spirit), but the church had not completed the cycle.

In verse 7 we learned that the church had been continually drinking in rain (symbolic of God's Spirit and godly knowledge) but hadn't done anything with it except let it be diverted into thorns and thistles like the sluggard in Proverbs 24:30-31. Do you realize that the parables of the sower represent interrupted metabolic cycles? The seed thrown on the rocky ground was not even allowed to enter the germination cycle. The seed on the thorny ground had its throughput diverted into worldly concerns, while only one field completed the cycle, bearing fruit.

### **A call for action**

There is no point in asking God for the Holy Spirit if we have no intention of using it. God's Spirit is the throughput, the fuel (our daily manna, so to speak), but it must be metabolized and converted into outward deeds and godly behavior, as James admonished in James 2:17: "If faith is not accompanied by action, it is stone dead."

Having or reading the book of knowledge will not cut it with God—but living it will.

Living means metabolizing Scripture and sermon notes. It means putting into practice immediately—or demonstrating an immediate application.

One minister gave a highly instructive lesson on exercise at a Graduate Club in North Hollywood in which he gave a 25- to 30-minute lecture while jogging on a rebounder. He mentioned that many of the men in his family had been subject to a heart condition and had not lived much past the age of 50. While he lectured, he waved his arms up and down like a symphony conductor, noting that he had observed many old symphony conductors. In this lecture, he not only gave us head knowledge, but actually lived it with his deeds.

As an old musician friend once suggested, music is not the notes on the music staff. It is what goes out of our mouths and instruments after the throughput has been assimilated into our nervous systems.

We need to assimilate and find an immediate use for God's Spirit. Herbert W. Armstrong used to repeatedly say, "The Holy Spirit is God's law in action." We could call it metabolized Torah.

### **Power of fellowship**

In the many congregations of the greater Church of God, we learn lessons about the cyclical nature of fellowship. The old-timers have come to appreciate the zeal and enthusiasm of the newcomers, and the newcomers have come to appreciate and profit from the maturity, experience, wisdom, *klugheit* and *sabiduria* of the old-timers. A balanced meal needs a little bit of the old (beefsteak) and a little bit of the new (fresh garden peas).

The interplay between the old and the new provides a healthy symbiotic cycle. It reminds me of our old arthritic dog Rex back on the farm. After we bought a new puppy, which kept nipping at his heels, old Rex started to become more limber and agile.

## **Cannibalizing others**

Problems occur when the cycle fails to move to completion in our large, overbloated state. Unfortunately, in a church that I previously attended, cliques and caste systems developed—enviously and spitefully cannibalizing other groups, unlike the healthy body in Romans 12 in which one organ serves the others.

In that church, animosity developed between the television department, the church's college and the publishing department. Ultimately one of those entities maliciously gobbled up the other two organs, destroying the protective filtration system (the metaphorical kidneys and other elimination organs to strain out, or filter out, the toxins and impurities).

When one organ maliciously and spitefully devours another organ in the body, the life-sustaining cycle is stopped and the perceived alien or gangrenous appendages must be systematically amputated. Eventually, without some kind of dialysis or protective filtration, the organism chokes in its own toxins, impurities and waste products.

## **Pathogenic bacteria**

As long as the metabolic cycles move harmoniously and rhythmically, life can be sustained. We have no fear of pathogenic bacteria or viruses. But, as soon as the cycle becomes interrupted, the body becomes diseased. The mechanical apparatus we build mimics our bodily cycles.

Several years ago a hotel decided to cut costs by turning off the air-conditioning system in a unused wing. In the moist, damp, dark recesses of the ducts, deadly pathogenic bacteria reproduced.

When the unused wing was opened to accommodate a delegation of Legionnaires, the heretofore dormant air-conditioning ducts pumped deadly pathogens onto the hapless Legionnaires.

Many of us living in the Deep South are sensitized to the stench emanating from our air-conditioning systems when we turn them on after they have remained off in sultry torrid conditions. Movement and circulation provide the only antidote to stagnation and death—whether we focus on the cell, organ, organism or ecosystem, whether we focus on the physical, psychological or spiritual.

## **Final thoughts**

Moving fluids and currents describe life.

Still or dormant fluids and currents describe death.

Coagulation leads to rigor mortis: the solidifying of vital fluids as I witnessed in a raccoon carcass I observed every day driving to work.

Our spiritual vitality is ensured if we metabolize what we learn through our deeds and behavior.

We will then be conduits for the living waters described in John 7:38: "Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living waters will flow from him."

Again, the water symbolically represents the life-sustaining throughput of God's Spirit. The spirit must flow, must move, to be life-sustaining.

In Revelation 22 we read about the millennial and postmillennial river of life, which provides throughput for the tree of life, healing the nations.

In Ezekiel 47:1-12 we also read of a life-sustaining river that purifies by circulating out the toxins. In verse 9 we read, "There will be a large number of fish because this water flows there and makes the saltwater fresh; so where the river flows everything will live."

This river appears again in Zechariah 14:8. We sing a hymn about this spectacle: "On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the western sea and the eastern sea."

When God's Kingdom is established, even the dormant Dead Sea will be given life, through the flowing process, the movement and animation of water.

The common denominator is that we must circulate, not coagulate.